# Realising the Potential: Early Childhood Forum

## Encouraging and Supporting Positive Parenting

## Session transcript

This podcast is one of a series of recordings made at Realising the Potential Early Childhood Forum, presented by the Department of Education and Training, on Friday the 8th of June, 2018, at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Our breakout session on Encouraging and Supporting Positive Parenting will feature the following speakers:

* Warren Cann, Chief Executive Officer at Parenting Research Centre;
* Marcia Armstrong, Principal Maternal and Child Health Nurse Advisor at the Department of Education and Training:
* Michell Forster, Indigenous Implementation Consultant at Triple P International;
* Tegan Bastow, Early Childhood Educator; and
* Kimberley Doe, Family Support Worker at Yappera Children’s Service Cooperative Limited.

### Wendy Allan

I’d like to welcome you all to this session obviously. It’s a very popular one, given we’ve got a lot of people in the crowd, and I can see quite a few familiar faces which makes me feel more comfortable, because I am not Kim Howard. I am Wendy Allan. I’m the Early Years Policy Advisor with the Municipal Association of Victoria. And unfortunately my dear colleague, Kim, is very, very unwell. So for her not to be here today is the testimony that she is really, really crook. So fortunately I’ve got the gig. So bear with me ‘cause I only found out about an hour ago. So here we go.

So I’ve introduced myself. I’d now like to do a formal acknowledgement. I would like to first acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today, the people of the Kulin nation. I would also like to pay my respects to their elders past and present, and the elders from other communities that may be with us today.

So just to check that you’re all in the right session, this is the one on Encouraging and Supporting Positive Parenting. And the irony is, is that if I hadn’t been facilitating this I would have been sitting exactly where you are, because it is something that I am very interested in. I mean I too am a parent, but I think for all of us in the sector, our parent body and community is an incredibly untapped resource. And I think for all of us, we need to really think about how we engage more with them. And, as Sharon said in her presentation this morning, how we actually use them as part of our advocacy platform for our sector.

Okay. So, as you know, the evidence is that parenting and the home environment arguably has the greatest impact on a child’s life, on their learning and development, and particularly during those early years. And we know that positive parenting can help overcome the effects of disadvantage.

So today we’ve assembled a panel of five experts, and I’m really pleased with the combination, because we have researchers, academics, practitioners, and certainly people who are on the ground dealing with parents in services every day. So I think it’ll be quite an interesting, and broad ranging perspective that you’ll get from our speakers as well.

So that’s what they’re going to do, they’re going to share their thoughts and perspectives on the role of parents, and the capacity of parents, and how we need to work with parents.

I have a social media message. I think all of our facilitators are required to say. Before we start I’d like to remind you to follow @detvic on Twitter, and I’d encourage you to join the conversation. It will be quite a valuable resource that the Department is really, really encouraging people to get in the conversation and give your thoughts. Those, you know, those opportunities are really valuable, because sometimes there’s just nuggets of gold in someone’s thought bubble that they send off into the ether that then can actually influence a direction that the Department takes. So, the hashtag, #realisingthepotential; #earlychildhoodforum; #vicedu.

So, now I’d like to introduce the speakers. I’m going to introduce them in a block, so they’ll stand up and you can see them. And then one by one they will come up on stage and do their presentation. We’ll leave questions, if we have time for questions, they’ll come back up at the end of the session. As a panel we’ll have a bit of a conversation, and like I said, if there’s an opportunity for questions from the floor we’ll try and do that. If not, then I’d encourage you to have further conversations with them over lunch.

So our first speaker is Warren Cann. Warren is the CEO of the Parenting Research Centre, and he’ll be our first speaker today. Our next speaker is Marcia Armstrong. Marcia’s the Principle Maternal and Child Health Nurse Advisor at the Department of Education. But for those of us in local government land, we know that Marcia’s had a long and prior history at Wodonga Council, so thank you. Michell Forster. Michell’s an Indigenous Implementation Consultant with the Triple P International. And we have two wonderful special guests. Tegan Bastow and Kimberley Doe. So, Tegan is an Early Childhood Educator, so she’s right in the thick of what we’re talking about in terms of working with families. And Kimberley is the Family Support Worker at Yappera Children’s Service Cooperative.

Okay. So I’m going to take a seat now and we’ll hear from our presenters. So on that note I’d like to invite Warren to take the stage. Thank you.

### Warren Cann

Okay. Thank you, thank you very much.

Those of you who are parents will realise that your instincts only get you so far, right? Pretty much as soon as you’ve had a baby you discover you’re on a very, very steep learning curve, and that’s what it’s like for human parents. We depend very much on our environment, on exposure to broad information and good support, because we start a learning journey that never stops. And we start from day one and we keep learning. And by the way, it doesn’t stop when you get to 18, right? It doesn’t even stop when you get to 20, 25. Frankly, it probably doesn’t stop when you get to 45 or 50, it’s a continual constant learning journey.

Parents these days though, live in a very interesting and unique informational environment. It’s very interesting just to look at the history of discussion about parents and parenting.

This is data that comes from Google’s Ngram. And, what Google did was they scanned 50 million books or so, and you can track the frequency of different phrases from the 1800s through to 2000s. I think they stopped in 2008. This is the frequency of the word parents as it occurred in books in that period of time, so relatively steady.

This is the word parenting. Benjamin Spock actually published his book Basic Care of Children I think it was, in about 1946. I don’t know whether that could be thought of as really as the starting point. It took a little while to take off. But from the mid-1960s we’ve seen an explosion in the term parenting. Parents today are learning and developing in an environment where parenting is on everybody’s lips, where everybody’s talking about parenting, where there are huge amounts of information about parenting.

And the thing is, is that information hasn’t coincided with greater compassion or understanding for parents. In fact in some ways, despite having access to lots of good information, parents are under more pressure now than they ever have been.

I’ve been really interested in this piece of research that was done in the US, that looked at parents experience of criticism. 61% of parents reported that they’ve been criticised for their parenting choices. It struck me as a little low to begin with, but at least that 61% were saying they’re being criticised. Who do they get criticised by? Let’s see if you’re surprised. 36% by other parents, 31% by in-laws 37% by their own mother or father, thankfully only 8% feel they’ve been criticised by their healthcare provider, and even better, well done ECEC, 6% have been criticised by their childcare provider.

And what do they get criticised about? We’ll see if there’s surprises here. You’re probably not surprised to find that 70% of the criticism will be about discipline, 52% about the food, 46% about sleep, and 39% about breast/bottle decisions.

So, parents these days are exposed to quite a high degree of negative feedback, sometimes from complete strangers in the street, but often from the people who are close to them and the ones who they probably are depending fairly heavily on for support.

So what is the result of this level of criticism? Well, I was really interested to see that 60% of parents will go out and seek more information if they are criticised. That’s a very positive, constructive thing to do isn’t it? Over half will ask a professional, that’s also reassuring. Over a third will actually make a change based on the feedback they get. But 42% said criticism left them feeling unsure of themselves. On the other hand, 67% felt bolstered in their choices, so they became even more determined to do what they currently do. And then, understandably, 50% will go on and avoid that critical person.

So, we have a very interesting dilemma isn’t it? We have parents who are needing information to grow and develop. On the other hand they are often exposed to this kind of negative kind of informing or feedback, and that is having very, very mixed results to say the least. And I think what this does is create a very interesting scenario for us in terms of people who are charged with supporting parents and developing their parenting in developing their skills and their confidence.

What I want to do is take you through a little bit about what we have learned about contemporary parent information seeking. And I want to make an argument for how particularly the role of ECEC could really be bolstered in meeting parents’ information needs.

It was the year before last, we had the opportunity to conduct a representative survey of 2,600 parents, these are Victorian parents, and this was a unique opportunity to talk to, using a telephone based survey technique, to talk to a large range of parents from all over Victoria in all sorts of situations and circumstances, funded by Victorian Government Department of Education and Training.

We learnt - in one way this study was quite interesting, was that we actually got to talk to 40% of men, and often fathers are left out of the discussion around parenting as we know, and we often don’t get their viewpoints. But we managed to get their viewpoints in this survey.

Just quickly what did we find? Well, 91% were actually - felt pretty confident as a parent, so they feel like they’ve got what it takes to do a good job. But when you dig a little bit deeper, there were some areas where they wondered about, and they were challenged by. Like 41% felt that they become impatient with their children just a bit too quickly. And nearly a third felt that they are sometimes too critical of their children. In terms of what they’re doing, we still have about 28% of parents say they’ll occasionally smack their children. But only 2% seem to be using smacking as a regular, or their normative way of dealing with discipline issues.

How is this? Are you surprised by this? 36% say that sleep is a problem for them, and that goes up to 50% for parents of babies and toddlers. As we’ll see later, sleep is a big deal for parents at the moment, and there are lots of challenges in that area.

I think also, like we’re also seeing some of these contemporary worries. 70% of parents and adolescents said their children spent too much time on electronic devices, so parents today are worried about this. We actually didn’t ask them whether they’re worried about their own use of electronic devices, we’re going to do that next year. 80% believe that early childhood education is important, or at least they believe that what they do at home is important for their children’s early education. So we don’t really have - we don’t need to convince parents that the early years are important, they’re already convinced.

Okay. Now here’s where I wanted to sort of begin to focus my attention a little bit more. 91% said they had someone trusted that they could turn to for advice, and that’s really good news. Only 3% were not sure where they would turn if they needed help. 91% felt that they could - there was someone in their lives who they could turn to for advice.

We did ask them though, where they get their information from. And this is quite interesting. This is information in addition to what they might learn from their own family, so this is more formal - or not necessarily more formal because it does include friends and neighbours, but people outside of the family. And you’ll see there that 83% of parents are talking to their peers and neighbours still, which is important for all of us who are involved in this peer orientated programs, people are still turning to their neighbours and friends when they’re looking for advice. But nearly 80% are now accessing information online.

Now we did a similar survey in 2004, and information online ranked about number five, and it ranked underneath professionals, talking to professionals. We’ve seen a massive change in that amount of time, and now information online is ubiquitous and people are essentially saying, when it comes to formal sources of information they go online and they go online first. Books are still up there. Health professionals same level as books basically, but isn’t that interesting, educators and teachers are as frequently asked as health professionals, by parents for information and advice.

The average parent has four to five sources of information. Four to five sources, so they’re not just relying on one. What percentage of parents use no additional information sources at all? Anybody want to guess? That’s a bit of a rhetorical question isn’t it? Less than 1%, so less than 1% of mothers use no additional sources other than their immediate family. So essentially what this says is virtually every parent is at some point in time accessing information. But what about fathers? 2.3% are not using any additional sources, which I think many might find surprising that fathers are actually more involved in information seeking than we once might have thought or assumed, a very, very small number don’t seek any information at all.

This is a breakdown of seeking information by children’s age. So green is zero to two, going to orange which is 13 to 18 years, and there’s a lot of information here to absorb. But I want you just to focus on one thing, and that was the online information. If you look at the online information, which is this set of columns here, you can see that online information use by the young age group is getting up to about 90%, so it’s becoming the normative way of getting information for the younger age group, and it does drop as children get older, towards the later years, as you might expect. But, I think what this tells us, is that this generation goes through online information will continue to be a really important source of information for parents.

Now this is also interesting, this is information used by SES, so this is a fairly rough measure of social disadvantage. And you’ll see the light green here is online information used, and you’ll see there that there is something of a difference when you look at the lowest levels of social disadvantage to the highest level of social disadvantage, but the difference is not as much as you would expect. I mean we’re still seeing upwards - over 70% of people from the most socially disadvantaged areas, accessing online information. So there is a - in a way there is still a little of a divide, digital divide, but also there’s a sort of a great democracy I think in this information - accessibility of information. Again, look how the educator features - all right - getting up to nearly 70% across all of those areas, so despite your background people are approaching their educator for information.

Okay. Now we can also look at this from the other side of the fence, because with our partners at Murdoch Children’s research Institute, we deliver the Raising Children Network website and associated resources. And that website, after 10 years of operation, gets 53,000 visits per day. Now visits are not just hits, that’s not just people flicking through, that’s people arriving and staying and looking. Okay, 53,000 visits per day.

And I think - by the way, guess what they’re looking at, sleep was accessed by 1.37 million parents last year. That takes us back doesn’t it? Okay, and yet, even though we might think and be able to argue quite conclusively, I think that online is the new universal, I think there will always be a crucial role for access to information from professionals, and there’ll always be those who need more than just access to information online.

And here I think there’s huge potential, particularly in ECEC services. This is just a little bit of a breakdown of parents seeking help from educators. And when you combine zero to two with three to five, you’ll see that almost half of all parents will talk to their early years educators about issues related to parenting, and this creates an enormous opportunity.

We also learned from our surveys that their experience is very positive. 81% are satisfied with the help they get from their early child educator. 82% believe that their ideas are valued by the educator.

In terms of the negatives, 82% disagreed with the statement that they felt judged by their educator. And, 92% disagreed with that they felt blamed and criticised by their educator. So that means there’s still some who are a little bit uneasy about the advice they were given, but what this seems to suggest is that, not only do parents approach and talk to their early educators, they find them very reasonable, supportive and understanding sources of information and advice.

And, just what about if we could begin to broaden our thinking about the impact of ECEC from, not just providing quality programs to parents of children while they’re in our service, but also potentially having an impact by supporting parents in their parenting role. And not that we would want to turn early childhood educators into social workers or even to parent educators, there still seems to me to be an enormous opportunity here, because of the nature of the service, and because of how well it’s received, to be providing support to parents in their role at home, essentially influencing what happens at home, not just influencing what goes on in a centre.

I think there are two sort of main opportunities that we can pursue here. One is opportunistic parenting support, that is when parents do seek information and ideas. And the other opportunity is in promoting parent development and learning.

So in my last five or so minutes, let me just touch on and give you maybe some tips on the way that might be able to work. First of all with proactive resourcing, this is about what we could do as an early childhood education service, to proactively support parents. One is to constantly communicate the message that parenting is learned, and is basically learned on the job. And everything that we do and say, if we’re reminding parents they are on a learning curve and a learning journey, that can take a lot of heat and a lot of the pressure out of the parenting.

If you think that’s a lot of books, all right, the web is nothing - the web is hugely worse. When I put parenting into Google just yesterday, I got 245 million hits. So, if you’re a conscientious parent you’ve got a lot of reading to do. And I think one thing that ECEC sector could do is to help parents narrow down, and get some of the confusion and mess out of the online information scene.

In our survey we asked parents how they heard about the Raising Children Network, and many find the Raising Children Network through Google. But what we discovered in Victoria here, because it was Victorian, was that people heard about it through their maternal and child health service, because it’s so well embedded in MCH.

Educators, look at that, it’s only 5% of parents learning through their early education and care. What about if we promoted the use of Raising Children Network through our early childhood education and care services? What about if parents could hear about the enormous resources available to them through our Raising Children Network?

And here are just some tips about how we could proactively resource. Could I just give you a little warning though, I remember hearing about a kindergarten teacher who sent a tip sheet home in the children’s bags about swearing. And then she had a lot of kind of interested, slightly irate queries the next day, about why particular kids had got certain information sheets. So you can make a mistake, it’s easy to make that kind of mistake. So in universal information provisions, very carefully, you want to really make it clear that when you are sharing information with it is everybody, and it can’t be misinterpreted as perhaps being targeted.

But, you know, using your information library, setting that up, maybe a dedicated a computer iPad, why not have it set up so it’s raising - so it’s got RCN on it? And, using RCN content in your newsletters, you could also be looking to enrol your families, get them connected to the RCN Facebook, you can ask them whether or not they are subscribing to the Grow With Us email newsletters.

Even in the act of enrolling you could be connecting them up to this information. And why not ask when they’re enrolling, did you know, have you heard about the Raising Children Network? And once they’re connected, well there’s a huge range of resources they can then access, whether that be video or whether that be hardcopy information resources, including new approaches that we’re taking like the delivery of short Webinars about, you know, key topic areas. These are new and just developing, but what an enormous opportunity we have here to promote this use of this resource through our services.

Okay, and then I’ll just finish with this in terms of responsive resourcing, because now you have this enormous and wonderful information architecture that you can use when you are responding to parents who indicate a need, or an interest, or ask you about something. Be vigilant for those opportunities. It might be just a passing comment. Always seek permission before offering information and advice. Just keep in mind, just because somebody is complaining about something, it doesn’t mean they’re asking for help, all right? So just be conscious and just make sure that you’ve got permission from them, hey, are you interested in some information about that? I’ve got something I might be able to share with you, before you give them that information.

And then you can make information more powerful by looking at it together. Look at the material together. Get on the website, find the information together. You can download and print resources from the RCN website, which you can then tailor to the parent that you’re working with, even putting your name and phone number on it makes it more likely that information will be received. And make sure you follow up, because parents need to know that information is just the start. There’s always something extra. There’s always something more you can do if you feel stuck. Don’t you think there’s a huge potential now, if we take our wonderful ECEC sector and properly use this incredible information resource that you have, to be able to both proactively resource parents, but also to be able to respond to parents when they ask you question like they often will?

Thanks very much.

### Marcia Armstrong

Good morning everyone. My name is Marcia Armstrong, and I’m the Maternal and Child Health Nurse Advisor for the DET.

I’d like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I’d also like to pay my respects to the elders both past and present, and any elders present here today.

Today I’m going to talk to you about the Maternal and Child Health Service in Victoria, and the implications it has actually for parenting and assisting with parenting, particularly with our vulnerable families.

So I’ll just tell you a little bit about the Maternal and Child Health Service in Victoria so people are very familiar with it. But it actually has three program areas that make it up.

The Universal Program, that all families actually are invited to attend as 10 key age-staged consultations where families are given anticipatory advice, and surveillance of health and development from birth to three and a half years. It also provides a flexible component that has additional visits, community strengthening activities, groups, and also telephone consultations. And some of those groups may include first-time parent groups and parenting groups along the continuum.

The second tier is the Enhanced Home Visiting, or the Enhanced Program, which is responsive to families who need additional needs. And at the moment we actually provide 15 hours to approximately 10% of the population zero to 12 months. But with the reforms in the education state that’s going to increase over the next three years to 20 hours and 15% of the population from zero to three years, and that’ll be fully implemented in 2021.

But supporting this is actually the Maternal and Child Health Line, which is advice and support for families from birth to school age, that provide 24 hours per day and seven days per week.

And then just looking at social media, Maternal and Child Health have just launched their Maternal and Child Health app, and that was launched on the 23rd of March this year. And since then, well by the time we got to May, we’ve actually had 20,000 downloads. And the good thing about this app is that it’s actually linked to evidence-based practice, and linked to the Raising Children’s Network and the information out of the Royal Children’s Hospital, and also promotes maternal and child health and linking back to Maternal and Child Health. And if it’s is two o’clock in the morning families can, you know, be reminded that the Maternal and Child Health Nurse is on the line, and they can ring and get a real voice to that, so a wonderful innovation.

But what Maternal and Child Health do is that they basically connect with families. And Maternal and Child Health in Victoria, have a really, really great way of first making that connection, because it’s actually legislated. There’s actually a birth notification system that goes to local government, that alerts the service that there is a new baby in the community. And all parents and infants and children are then invited to participate in that service, so we know where everyone is.

But then it is about engaging those new families and keeping them engaged, and coordinating and building relationships with other services because Maternal and Child Health are not the experts in all areas, and we do need to tap into everyone else so that we can provide the best service for our families. And that means actually, at a local level, knowing where those people are and how we connect and where we refer to, and that community strengthening activity in the universal platform, is a way that we actually do that.

But we also have to collaborate with other professionals so that we have a really good working relationship, and that includes general practitioners, family services workers, people working in supported playgroups and community playgroups, kindergartens and even with Child Protection. And we have to be very clear that we know what our real roles are and what everyone else is doing, to make sure that we hit the mark with parents.

But just a little reminder about how many parents we see in Victoria, and this is our latest stats that we have collated. We actually see in the first year, 95% of parents across the state. And even by three and a half years we’re still seeing over 63%, very powerful.

The Enhance Service at the moment is seeing 1200 individual families even if they’re just working in that 10% zero to 12 months, but will go up to actual 15% zero to three, and then probably it’ll be 37 - estimated to be 37 families that will get that support. But have a look at how much the lines do, 90,000 calls a year, and it’s incredible the support that can be provided, and the direction that can be provided to parents with parenting.

But when we actually look at our vulnerable families, our families who need that extra support, we actually have that universal service running along there all the time, supported 24 hours by the Maternal and Child Health Line, but we also have our Enhance Program. It’s a more targeted program that actually looks at what the strengths of families are, but also their additional needs. And we have the ability to collaborate, coordinate, and connect families with services that are going to be very good for them.

And we know that the most powerful influence on children’s development is the quality of the parenting they receive, and the quality and the nature of those home learning environments. And when we look at maternal and child health, they’ve got the ability, like we’ve got around 80,000 birth notifications each year in Victoria, there’s 80,000 home visits, first home visits that occur in Victoria. Nurses in Victoria see the home, they know exactly what it looks like. So we’ve got a really powerful environment where we can do that.

These are the things for good outcomes of children that we know that they need, and Maternal and Child Health can as a service, but also a provision of moving families along the early years continuum, can actually provide these outcomes for families.

And when we look at what they do, we can look at supportive programs that we go in, in the Enhanced Program, but we also can look at supportive programs across the continuum that can assist parents, and particularly supported playgroups and making sure that children actually access the next chronological area that they need to progress to going to school, and that includes early start kindergarten and the year before kindergarten.

And I recently – have spent 17 years working at the City of Wodonga, where Wodonga have a very strong early years platform, and this was the design of the early years in Wodonga with the very much universal Maternal and Child Health moving through there, but supported by the additional programs on a chronological basis to children going to school, and including the secondary and tertiary supports, and also the networking groups that are needed to make it happen. And interestingly enough, when we look at the AEDC data of a very strong early years program, we can actually see that the vulnerability on one or more domains, or two or more domains in Wodonga from 2009 to 2015, actually had that declining trend line, which is a wonderful outcome.

But I must say, that over in Victoria we do have a very strong platform of early years, and I think it is us working together, and communicating together, collaborating together, that we can actually provide the most meshed in service system that’s going provide the best outcomes. And I don’t think that there’s any mistake that Victoria actually has the best AEDC outcomes out of all the states in Australia.

And I’ll have to finish there I think. Thank you.

### Michell Forster

Uncle Kenny, a mature-aged Aboriginal man living in a mission, an Aboriginal community out West Queensland, where I was delivering Triple P, a range of Triple P programs over a view years, Uncle Kenny had come to quite a few of those programs that I was delivering. He actually came to three of the Group Indigenous Triple P Program for zero to 12, children aged zero to 12. He also came to a Team Triple P for parents of teenagers. These two sit at a higher level of our Triple P, at a level four. He also came to some seminars that I had delivered, three in fact he came along to. He never ever contributed a word in all those programs that he came to. He wasn’t rude to me, he would also dip his head hello or say hello. I tried to engage in conversation with him in morning teas, afternoon teas and lunch, but he never really spoke a word to me at all.

I’d learn a few things about Uncle Kenny through our local community coordinator, that he was the sole parent of his six kids, and that his wife had been taken by the grog disease. I also found out that a few other people in that community were attending the programs as they were mandated to do the program, but Uncle Kenny was not mandated.

It was about six months - I’d actually sadly, really sadly, come to the conclusion that he was just attending these programs to receive the very healthy IGA vouchers that people were getting at the end of the completion of the program.

It was about six months after I’d last seen Uncle Kenny in that community, I had been speaking with a few other people in the street, and I noticed him across the road talking to a young man who was probably about 17. And I watched him. It was a very brief conversation that he’d had with him. And he turned and he started to cross the road and he saw me. And he walked straight up to me and he said this, ‘I did what you told me to do’. I looked at him and I said, ‘what’s that Uncle’? And, he goes, ‘that’s my boy over there. He’s just come up to me and said he had to go to court next week. So I did what you said, I didn’t say anything I just listened to him. Then he told me had to go on Tuesday. So I said to him do you want me to come with you boy? And he said yeah, that’d be good dad’. Then he looked me and he had tears in his eyes. And he said, ‘that boy hasn’t spoke to me for over a year’. Make me cry now. So he said, ‘it’s really good isn’t it? That really worked what you told me to do. That boy is talking to me now. So I’m going to support him. I’m going to go to court with him next year’. Uncle Kenny thinks I told him what to do.

You see when we support parents with Triple P, we never assume the role of the expert. We allow the parents to be the expert in their own families and we don’t tell parents what to do. Triple P uses a self-regulatory framework. This is our model up here.

So what we know with Triple P is that parents who are expects, and positive parents on their own children and families, are the ones that can self-manage. They have the tools or the skills that parents can use to become experts on their own children. This includes deciding for themselves which strategies they would like to try out, and which best would suit them and their families.

Triple P also emphasises that each parent is responsible for the way they choose to raise their children. This allows for a parent’s values and cultural beliefs to be incorporated into what they want to see for the children in the long-term and in the short-term.

So parents select those aspects on their own, of their own and their child’s behaviours they wish to work on, and the goals they wish to work on, to specific parenting and child management techniques they wish to implement and self-evaluate.

What was Uncle Kenny thinking? They’re all so confident. We also know that parents who are experts, or positive parents are confident. There’s a parental self-efficacy. Confidence refers to a parent’s belief in themselves and that they can overcome or solve parenting or child management problems. Parents with high confidence have positive expectations about possibility of change.

We also know that parents who are the experts, and positive parents take ownership. They have personal agency. Here the parent increasingly sees the changes or improvements, are because of their own or their child’s efforts, rather than to chance, age or maturity factors, or uncontrollable events such as genetic make-up or people telling them what to do, how to parent. Uncle Kenny still thinks I told him what to do.

We also know positive parents take ownership. Problem solving refers to a parent’s ability to apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired to issues beyond the presenting concern. It refers to a parent’s ability to flexibly adapt, or apply what they have learned to new problems at later development phases, with different children, and for a variety of child behaviour problems and family concerns. This means the test of whether a parenting intervention is truly successful, and is not simply the parent’s ability to resolve current issues but their capacity to address a diverse range of family challenges over time, with relative autonomy. I had not seen Uncle Kenny for six months.

We also know that positive parents are resourceful and resilient. They have self-sufficiency. As a parenting program is time-limited, parents need to be able to manage problems on their own, so they trust their own judgement and become less reliant on others in carrying out basic parenting responsibilities. Resourceful and resilient parents are self-sufficient, and have the knowledge and skills to parent with confidence. When confronted with a new problem they use their knowledge skills and personal resources to resolve the problem. Uncle Kenny.

Encouraging parents to become resourceful and resilient, means that parents become more connected to social support networks, and community like elders, parents, extended family, friends and childcare supports. It is thought that the more resourceful and resilient parents become, the more likely they are to seek appropriate support when they need it, advocate for their children, become involved in their children’s schooling, sporting clubs, and protect them from harm, effectively managing conflict with partners, siblings, and creating a secure low conflict environment.

We want parents to be the experts in their families raising their children. We want parents to be in control for themselves, to self-organise, to be successful contributors of their own lives. And we support our families to reach their full potential and thrive, in my experience this is what parents want to do as well.

Our people have been told what to do for a few hundred years now, including how to parent. How can we parent when we’re told what to do? We need to do this on our own. We need to raise our own children, with our own beliefs, in our own homes, in our own communities our way. Support is great to accomplish this, but we cannot manage if you tell us what to do, because it’s your way not ours.

So at this point Uncle Kenny thinks I told him what to do, and in fact I never told Uncle Kenny what to do at all. I was nowhere near that man that day, he decided that he was going to stop and listen to his son when he approached him. He decided for himself that the wasn’t going to get angry as he normally would and give him a 2,000 word lecture. I am guilty of giving Uncle some information, this is true, some tools and some strategies, but Uncle Kenny was on his own that day. Did I tell Uncle Kenny what to do? No I didn’t. He did that all by himself.

But I do wonder this. What if Uncle Kenny received these positive parenting tips and strategies to support him when his son was only two, or three, or four years of age, would I have been having that conversation with him that day, or would his son have been caught up in the system?

Thank you.

### Tegan Bastow and Wendy Allan

So we’ve just done a bit of a presentation, so we’re from Yappera Children’s Service and we’re just going to talk about how as we as a service engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

So first I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting here today, and pay my respects to elders past, present and who are in the room.

So a bit about Yappera. Yappera was the first Aboriginal Early Childhood Education and Care Service to be established within Victoria in 1980. So funding was secured through the Department of Social Security, to deliver a range of multifunctional services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including family support services, NCH programs, and a long day care component. So in later years a kindergarten component was also incorporated into the service. So we started off in a small building in Fitzroy and then we moved to a service that was purpose-built in 1992.

The Yappera Children Service offers a range of services for children aged between six months and five years, a long day care program, early start kindergarten program, pre-school kindergarten program and a January program. We are quite lucky to employ a number of Aboriginal staff within the service which helps support our families.

So the next two slides we’ll talk about some of the programs that we do to promote attendance, participation, engagement and retention within the service.

So at Yappera we were lucky enough to be part of the Koorie Kids Shine at Kindergarten Campaign. So, in these brochures they were all shot at Yappera. The Koorie Kids Shine in Kindergarten Campaign aims to help every Koorie family feel welcome and included when they walk into an early childhood service. The aim is to increase participation in kinder by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Research shows that children who have a stimulating, supportive and healthy start are more likely to do well later in life. The Victorian Government have made an ongoing commitment to provide all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with access to two years of high quality kindergarten programs, three year old and four year old kindergarten in the years prior to school.

Extensive research demonstrates that kindergarten programs help children with their language development and self-confidence. An earlier start, and more time at kindergarten, prepares children for success at school, and has a positive impact later in life.

Early start kindergarten is available for children who turn three by April in the year they will be attending kindergarten.

So in this slide we’ve got - we have the Victorian Aboriginal House Service. They come in and they run a Healthy Lifestyles Program within the service. So they focus on healthy eating, gross motor activities, and have a healthy themed program that they deliver to children on a weekly basis. Some of the topics include fruit and vegetables, eating healthy, drinking water, different sports, how to be sun smart. And up in that photo there’s a man in a costume so he’s Deadly Dan, and he talks to the parents about smoking and the affects it could have you your body.

At Yappera we have a cultural music and traditional dance program. As part of the program we ensure that a cultural component is incorporated. We were lucky enough to have Robert and Gary come to Yappera on a weekly basis, and both run a cultural program within the service. Both Robert and Gary are also parents of children that attend Yappera. It is vital that children are around positive male role models. These programs help the children with their identity and cultural safety. The children take great pleasure in learning through movement and dance.

We’re also lucky to have partnered up with Thornbury Primary School. So they offer a Woiworung language program from prep to grade six. So we’re linked in term four and go across to the school and participate in classes once a fortnight. Family involvement with incursions and excursions, Yappera organises whole service excursions where parents are invited along. This encourages family’s participation and input on their children’s learning, and also forms positive relationships between the child, educators and carers.

On a weekly basis we also have Hey Dee Ho (music progam) participate within the programs. The children, as you can see, they’re very interactive and they love it. They go home talking about the different themes they do each week, it’s different nursery rhymes. And they also explore musical concepts, so beat, rhythm, tempo, pitch, and the dynamics in every session.

Each program is set around a theme where they use props, puppets and non-tuned musical instruments to participate.

Yappera also runs a Bush Kindergarten Program. At Bush Kinder the children and adults benefit from using only what nature has provided. Yappera’s Bush Kinder Program was established in 2016. Yappera developed a curriculum in which children could lead their own play and learning with the nature. It recognises the place, the bush, and the significance of the land in Aboriginal culture.

So as a follow-on to Bush Kinder, so we actually ran it in a parklands in the Darebin region. So as a follow-on to that, we also have the Responsible Pet Ownership Program come in, and they educate the children about being safe around dogs, and I guess making sure that within Bush Kinder and within your home that you’re doing the right things with animals, and making sure you’re not going near them when they’re eating or showing signs of distress or anything like that.

These are also some of the services that Yappera offers, so onsite maternal child health, onsite specialist services, early child intervention programs, dental, general health, immunisation, speech therapy, nutritional resources and advice, and referrals and support.

So in the next few slides we’ll talk about community events and programs that we attend with the children, or that we run for the community.

So every year Yappera have an annual NAIDOC disco, which is a community event. It is one of the favourite activities for the children. And every year the community and families participation is growing. So Yappera also takes the children to community events throughout NAIDOC Week. So some of the events that we attend are the Collingwood Children’s Farm NAIDOC event, the VAEAI Movie Day, the Elders Luncheon which is held at the Aboriginal Advancement League, and the Victoria Place NAIDOC event; National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day. Children’s Day is held on the 4th of August every year.

National Children’s day is a time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to celebrate the strength and culture of their children. Every year the educators organise or attend events to celebrate National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day.

So, Yappera hold a range of family workshops and information sessions throughout the year, where all families are encouraged to participate in, and contribute to their children’s learning. We encourage families to share their ideas, skills and knowledge and to feel a sense of belonging and equality within our service. Yappera encourages families to attend these sessions, to build and support good relationships.

So in these photos it shows our group meal time at one of our family nights, and information centre - session sorry. This bottom left is one of the proud dads, and the bottom right is of an art exhibition that we had. And this, so we had a yarning circle which was really good. We had a few parents come along. And the bottom two are our Bush Kinder camp barbecues, so they come along and they get to explore the Bush Kinder setting with their children.

Yappera hold a Christmas Breakup Party to bring our families together to celebrate the year. This encourages the Yappera community to get involved and have fun interactions with the children and educators. This is one of the favourite events that the majority of our families attend every year.

And as you can see from the photos, staff we love to dress the part.

So at the end of last year Yappera received some funding for a family support worker. Yappera observed that there was a need for a family support worker due to the increase in vulnerable families within the early childhood sector. So as it is a new role, we - I guess we’ve been guiding the role to the family’s needs. I, myself, am employed in that position, but I’ve also got the seven years behind me within the service. So from there we’re, yeah, just really guiding and going by the parent’s needs and what they feel they need support in.

Thank you for listening to us today. We’ve brought some brochures and pamphlets if anyone wants to know more about the service.

## Wendy Allan

So there is a question that I have got, and perhaps if each of you just give me, you know, what would be your top thing that you would say to this group, of qualified, you know, experienced educators about working with parents or supporting parents? Or what could they do differently with parents?

So in any order, just one thing that you think makes a real difference.

### Michell Forster

Get Triple P trained, no. No, just never assume that you’re the expert when you’re working with parents, because we don’t really know what’s going on inside families, or with parents, or you know, or what good things they are doing. And I know when we - when I’m working with parents that they are doing a lot of good things, and sometimes they just need a little bit more support. And something I think also, that kind of pricks my ears all the time when I hear it, is I constantly hear people say I’m dealing with this family. I’m dealing with this family. And, we’re not really dealing with them, we’re supporting them or working with them. So sometimes when they might hear that word too, it’s a bit of a rundown, so yeah, just supporting our parents and letting our parents take the role as the expert and supporting them.

### Wendy Allan

Thanks. Marcia?

### Marcia Armstrong

I think the concept that it takes a village to raise a child. Parents are children’s first educators. But I think it’s about the collaboration that we have as professionals and service providers, and if we all are working together we can actually provide the best suite of services that we can actually support our community and have the best outcomes for our children.

### Wendy Allan

Thanks. Warren?

### Warren Cann

I would say that you don’t have to be a parenting expert to be able to help parents, that everybody in this room, whether they’re an educator, or a nurse, or a social worker, or whatever, has access to knowledge and information and ideas that could be incredibly valuable for parents, but all we have to do is pay a little bit more attention to the way we help. And I thought it was interesting the conversation really coming really true, the presentation today was the need to be able to recognise and support parental autonomy and choice making. We need to be able to find ways of sharing information with parents, but that doesn’t just tell parents what to do, and that means sharing information in such a way so that parents get to make choices, and get to apply some of the ideas that we might be able to offer them, but apply them in such a way is that it’s consistent with their own values and beliefs and what they want for their children. And I think in the future it would be great to unpack what that kind of practice looks like, you know, in more detail. What does that practice look like, because many of us come into our careers wanting to work with children, but we find ourselves now working with parents, right? And that can get a bit tricky. It can get - we can get tricky. It’s easy to fall into a whole, say the wrong thing, and you’ve got a defensive parent on your hands. So I know the Department’s interested in this, and I’m looking forward to seeing more work being done on how do we actually share the kind of practice that makes us more effective in working with parents.

### Wendy Allen

Thank you.

### Tegan Bastow

I think some of the strategies that we use within our service is to keep trying. Try different things different ways, and I guess having partnerships with different organisations as well, and having that information flowing and being consistent.

### Wendy Allan

Okay. On that note I’m going to close this session. Thank you all for your attention and attendance. Enjoy the rest of the day. Please thank all our fantastic speakers.